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ABSTRACT

Euro-American values dominate the field of psychology, and their cultural assumptions are often accepted as universal. However, there are significant differences between Western and non-Western thinking and thus what educators take to be psychological norms are often rejected by many of the students and families they are supposed to serve. Despite the intention of teacher education institutions to help teachers become more aware of how to relate instructional content and processes to the cultural context of their students, the following changes appear necessary: (1) colleges of education should become models of cultural diversity on their own campuses; (2) student teachers must be given the opportunity to acquire experiences with students from backgrounds different from their own; (3) students who are learning to be teachers must learn in a way that emphasizes relationships; (4) professional education materials and textbooks must address issues pertinent to multicultural populations; and (5) teacher education programs must devote more attention to the important roles that parents and community play in the effective education of students. The paper concludes that any educational system that ignores the history and perspectives of its students or does not attempt to accommodate its teaching practices for the benefit of all its learners is contributing to the pervasive inequality of opportunity which marks our society today. (ND)

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UNDERSTANDING MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES: IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW TEACHER ROLES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES

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In education, psychology dominates the literature about learning and motivation. Yet, why people do what they do, the focus of any motivational query, is well within the realm of religion, philosophy, physics, and every person's common sense. All of these entities, including psychology, are culturally embedded. Words, the conceptual building blocks of any theory, are culturally influenced as are the values, goals, and perspectives of any practioner or advocate of a particular idea. Since culture is an influential part of anyone's world, it is rare, perhaps even impossible, for any human being to behave without responding to some aspect of culture (Segall, Dasan, Berry, and Poortinga, 1990).

Euro-American values dominate the field of psychology and their cultural assumptions are often accepted as universal. Most psychologists gloss over the fact that many of the world's people do not accept the basic assumptions of their discipline. Some serious differences between Western and non-Western thinking, for example, are achievement orientation versus the annihilation of desire; individual self-direction and independence versus interdependence and guidance from others; a belief in progress and control versus a belief in finding one's place in the environment; a scientific versus a spiritual understanding of humanity. Although this contrast oversimplifies both systems, it points out that what educators take to be psychological norms are often rejected by many of the students and families they are suppose to serve.

When psychology defines normality according to empirically based evidence and mathematically determined standards, educators, often unwittingly, carry restrictive assumptions about learning, motivation, mental health, and ability. Psychological tests further marginalize underrepresented students, as do the psychologically determined use of labels such as "at risk" and "learning disabled" which often impose the requirement that further psychologically oriented testing and methods of assistance be employed. Far too much of this presumes that dysfunction is located in an individual as opposed to a possibly defective and culturally insensitive system (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, in press).

Multiculcturalism assumes that the gender ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society should be reflected in the structures of educational institutions, including staff, norms, values, assessment, and curriculum (Banks and McGee Banks, 1993). Thus, education which is culturally responsive occurs when there is equal respect for the backgrounds and contemporary circumstances of all students, regardless of individual status and power, and a design of learning processes which

embraces the range of needs, interests, and orientations to be found among them. Although the *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* are not critical of the implicit cultural bias in psychology, they do compliment this philosophy.

Since psychology does not offer consistent, unifying principles that lead to predictable results, teachers and psychologists should at the very least accept that each student best represents her or his own reality, especially when it comes to what that individual finds motivating. This form of constructivism does not preclude the existence of an external reality, it merely claims that people construct their own reality through interpreting perceptual experiences of the external world based on their unique set of experiences with the world and their beliefs about them. Generic motivational goals such as success or achievement and more pejorative personal qualities such as ambition or initiative may not only have different meanings to different people but may also be undesirable for cultural reasons. In this light, influences such as religion, myth, ethnicity, and regional and peer group norms may have powerful motivational force and resource.

In general, the internal logic as to why a person does something may not agree with ours but it is, nonetheless, there. To be an effective teacher means being open to that understanding and co-creating with the learner a motivating educational experience. Rather than knowing what *to do to* the learner we interpret and deepen the meaning we *share* together (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, in press). Motivationally effective teaching has to be culturally responsive teaching.

From this perspective teachers are less likely to intervene, establish, or determine the students' motivation to learn and more likely to elicit, affirm, or encourage the students' natural capacity to make meaning from experience. In this role motivation is intrinsically determined. Many teachers do not know how to evoke student motivation in a culturally sensitive manner. Their preservice and college education has not prepared them for this kind of teaching. Inservice is costly and inefficient. Systemically, symbolically, and in terms of future consequences, teacher education is the most important area to affect.

From several different sources numbers hint at the scope of the challenge facing teacher education institutions to prepare educators as learner-centered practitioners. When we realize that more than 100 languages are spoken in the school systems of New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and Fairfax County, Virginia and that in California, one out of six students are born outside the United States, we know the enormous role cultural sensitivity plays in how effectively a teacher can respond to the individual needs of students. The quality and depth of how well teacher education prepares teachers for such diversity is a core determinant as to whether they actually will be learner-centered

Despite the intentions of teacher education institutions to help teachers become more aware of how to relate instructional content and processes to the cultural

contexts of their students, the following changes appear necessary:

1. Colleges of education will have to become, themselves, models of cultural diversity on their own campuses. This means recruiting and retaining under-represented minority faculty. We need to realize that as long as 96% of full professors, 92% of associate professors, and 89% of assistant professors are white (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1987), we cannot illustrate in the most fundamental sense the nature of a multi-ethnic society nor recruit under-represented minority students to the teaching profession. In order to improve this condition in an immediate sense as well as to gain a realistic awareness of present conditions in public education, cooperative arrangements and exchanges with school systems that allow school-based personnel to teach and consult in the university, are needed. Exchange programs of this sort between historically African-American school systems and predominantly European-American institutions have proved beneficial (Dilworth, 1992).

2. Student teachers must be given the opportunity to acquire experiences with students from backgrounds different from their own. The challenge, in a sense, is to make the fish aware of the water. That is, the student teacher must become aware of phenomena so much an unquestioned part of one's social environment that she or he is not normally aware that they exist (Nelson-Barber and Mitchell, 1992). Although such direct exposure is essential, it may not, generally speaking, be enough. There is also necessity for teacher educators to establish a setting and foster a process that elicits productive reflection on and assimilation of, the multicultural experiences to which the student teacher will be exposed. To establish a sense of community where feelings and needs may be more adequately dealt with, a cohort group of student teachers with a faculty mentor who has practical multicultural experience should meet in seminar fashion to learn from one another, with experienced teachers and parents from the community serving as teaching assistants (and obvious role models).

3. Students who are learning to be teachers must learn in a way that emphasizes relationships. Teachers need to be able to connect with their students and it is within this connectedness that most people, especially ethnic minorities, can comfortably learn academic subjects and gain self-worth (Delpit, 1988). Teacher education must model this kind of education rather than tell student teachers they must relate to their students in a more personal way. It is necessary for teacher educators, themselves, to be as involved with the student teachers as they are asking the student teachers to be with their own students.

4. Professional educational materials and textbooks must address issues pertinent to multicultural populations. Student teachers must receive a broader perspective on why some students respond differently from others to certain kinds of relationships and methods of teaching. Teacher educators must take the responsibility to selectively choose professional education materials that devote ample attention to

multicultural differences and related issues of diversity. Theoretical and applied work cited should be recent and comprehensively covered throughout the textbook, rather than solely in those areas where students of color are traditionally, and often erroneously discussed, for example, classroom management and at-risk students .

5. Teacher education programs must devote more attention to the important roles that parents and community play in the effective education of students. Teachers must be trained how to communicate better and work more closely with the parents of their students. According to a special report by the National Committee for Citizens in Education, the evidence is beyond dispute: Parent involvement improves student achievement (Henderson, 1987). It improves positive attitude toward school and encourages children to learn. These benefits are not confined to early childhood or the elementary level; there are strong effects from parent cooperation continuously throughout high school (Wlodkowski and Jaynes, 1990).

Motivation to learn is an equity issue. Any educational system which ignores the history and perspective of its students or does not attempt to accommodate its teaching practices for the benefit of all its learners is contributing to the pervasive inequality of opportunity which marks our society today. When we understand *motivation to learn* as a developing trait which influences lifelong learning we see how insidious such bias in teaching can be. People who eventually find reading writing, calculating, and expanding their store of information interesting and satisfying activities are usually considered lifelong learners. The tendency to find such processes meaningful and worthwhile is considered to be the trait of motivation to learn, a value for learning often narrowly labeled as "academic" that gradually develops over time. Deci and Ryan (1990) offer the opinion that the key to acquiring such a value is feeling free enough to accept it as one's own. *The Learner-Centered Psychological Principles* support culturally responsive teaching. In this way they provide another documented understanding of why emancipation is crucial to the motivation of all students and a life where learning is a compelling joy and the means for a better future.

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